

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

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ALL OTHER CANADIAN POSTS (BY POUCH)

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 OTTAWA 01206

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: JOE CLARK'S FIRST YEAR AS PC LEADER

REF: OTTAWA 2103 (1976)

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: EVALUATION OF JOE CLARK'S FIRST YEAR AS LEADER OF PROGRESSIVE CONSERVATIVE (PC) PARTY REVEALS SOME STRONG PLUSES, SOME SERIOUS MINUSES, ALL OF WHICH LEAD TO FRUSTRATING INABILITY TO HANDICAP, WITH ANY CONFIDENCE, CLARK'S CHANCES OF BECOMING NEXT PM. ONE PROBLEM IS THAT MAIN VARIABLE IS BEYOND CLARK'S CONTROL. DECISIVE FACTOR LIKELY TO BE TRUDEAU AND HIS HANDLING OF QUEBEC SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. TWO COMMENTS, BOTH CLARK'S, REVEAL MAJOR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF HIS LEADERSHIP PERFORMANCE TO DATE. "I AM AN ORGANIZER" HE NOTED WHEN ELECTED LAST FEBRUARY. COMMENTING ON DYNAMIC, PERSONALIZED STYLE OF TRUDEAU LEADERSHIP, CLARK OBSERVED, "I'M NOT A SUPERMAN AND I NEED A LOT OF LIEUTENANTS. ONE PERSON CAN'T DO IT."

3. ON PLUS SIDE, CLARK'S ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY STANDS OUT. DURING PAST YEAR, HE HAS BEEN ON ROAD FOR 137
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DAYS, TRAVELLING MORE THAN 84,000 MILES ACROSS COUNTRY. RESULTS HAVE BEEN IMPRESSIVE. REPORTEDLY HE NOW HAS IN PLACE WIDE NETWORK OF GENERALLY YOUNG, AGGRESSIVE POLITICAL ORGANIZERS IN RIDINGS FROM COAST-TO-COAST. CLARK HAS ALSO MADE GENERALLY FAVORABLE IMPRESSION ON ELECTORATE IN LOCALITIES HE HAS VISITED. SEVERELY CRITICIZED FOR FAILURE TO PROJECT IMPRESSIVE IMAGE ON

NATIONAL SCALE (SEE BELOW), CLARK HAS BEEN HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN LOCAL MILIEU, SHAKING HANDS ON MAIN STREET OR WORKING REGIONAL TALK SHOWS.

4. CLARK'S ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITIES HAVE ALSO PAID DIVIDENDS IN OTTAWA. IT IS NEAR TRUISM HERE THAT PC HAS PERENNIALY BEATEN THEMSELVES WITH INTRA-PARTY BATTLING, AND NOWHERE HAS THIS BEEN MORE EVIDENT THAN IN COMMONS CAUCUS. CAUCUS FACTIONS RANGE FROM ULTRA CONSERVATIVES TO MODERATE LIBERALS WITH GENEROUS SPRINKLING OF PERSONAL VENDETTAS. CLARK HAS, THROUGH CARROT AND STICK, SUCCEEDED IN GETTING CAUCUS TO WORK TOGETHER. FOR EXAMPLE, CLAUDE WAGNER, CLOSE RUNNER-UP TO CLARK IN LEADERSHIP RACE, HAS BEEN ENTIRELY NEUTRALIZED AS A TROUBLEMAKER. DIEFENBAKER, WHO BLAMED CLARK FOR HELPING TO UNSEAT HIM AS LEADER IN 1960'S, HAS BEEN REDUCED TO OCCASIONAL MUTTERINGS ABOUT CLARK'S BLAND LEADERSHIP. JACK HORNER, HEAD OF RIGHT-WING FACTION, HAS TAKEN ACTIVE ROLE AS TRANSPORT SHADOW MINISTER. CLARK HAS ACTIVELY SOLICITED VIEWS FROM ALL ELEMENTS, AND HE HAS BEEN ADEPT AT BROKERING AND DEFLATING DISPUTES. UPSHOT IS THAT CAUCUS IS MORE HARMONIOUS THAN IT HAS BEEN FOR AT LEAST A DECADE.

5. DOWNSIDE OF CLARK'S PERFORMANCE EVOLVES ENTIRELY AROUND IMAGE. YOUNG (38), HE LOOKS YOUNGER THAN HIS YEARS. THIN, GANGLING AND WITH RECEDING CHIN, CLARK LOOKS AS UNATHLETIC AS HE, IN FACT, IS. HE HAS NO EYE-CATCHING HOBBIES BECAUSE HE HAS NO HOBBIES AT ALL

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BEYOND POLITICS. HIS MACHO COUNT IS, IN SHORT, VERY NEARLY ZERO. CLARK HAS A GOOD MIND OF PRAGMATIC, ORGANIZED SORT, BUT HE IS NO DAZZLING INTELLECT. INEVITABLY, ALL THESE CLARK CHARACTERISTICS ARE MAGNIFIED UNFAVORABLY BY COMPARISONS TO TRUDEAU WHO STILL CAPTIVATES IMAGINATION OF CANADIAN ELECTORATE. LIKE HIM OR NOT (AND POLLS SHOW MANY DO NOT), NEARLY ALL CANADIANS REACT EMOTIONALLY TO TRUDEAU STYLE. TO DATE, CLARK CAN GENERATE NO MORE THAN HO-HUM REACTION.

6. CLARK HAS BEEN GENERALLY CRITICIZED IN MEDIA FOR SAYING LITTLE AND ARTICULATING NO ALTERNATIVE POLICY. CHARGE IS PARTLY VALID AS EVEN HIS CLOSE ADVISORS HAVE ADMITTED TO EMBASSY OFFICERS. THEY ARGUE THERE IS NO NEED TO LAY OUT FULL PROGRAM FAR IN ADVANCE OF ELECTIONS WHICH WOULD BE SUBJECT TO LIBERAL ATTACK. CHARGE IS, HOWEVER, PARTLY INCORRECT. CLARK HAS ADVANCED SOME PRECISE POLICIES ON ECONOMY, DEFENSE AND, TO A DEGREE, ON FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL RELATIONS. MEDIA WILL NOT CON-

CEDE THIS, HOWEVER, SINCE SPEECHES AND NATIONAL PUBLIC APPEARANCES HAVE NOT BEEN NEWS-WORTHY. SOMEHOW, CLARK AND HIS SPEECH-WRITERS MISS TURN OF PHRASE WHICH MAKES NEWS. NET EFFECT IS PARTIALLY UNFAIR CHARGE OF KNOW-NOTHING RUNNING PARALLEL TO BLAND PERSONAL STYLE.

7. PROBLEM IN HANDICAPPING CLARK'S CHANCES OF BECOMING NEXT PRIME MINISTER IS THAT PLUS OR MINUS IN EQUATION HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH CLARK. DECISIVE FACTOR WILL BE TRUDEAU. DESPITE SOME OBVIOUS UNEASINESS IN SITUATION,

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 OTTAWA 01206

TOP PC STRATEGISTS POINT TO POLLS WHEN CONFRONTED WITH PURPORTED LACK OF CLARK CHARISMA OR ALLEGED LACK OF AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM. AND THEIR ARGUMENT IS PERFORCE RATHER PERSUASIVE. PC STARTED OUT-POLLING LIBERALS MONTH CLARK WAS ELECTED LEADER (FEB '76) AND HAVE NEVER SINCE TRAILED. CURRENT LEAD IS 10 PERCENT. IMPLICIT IN THIS ARGUMENT/STRATEGY IS ASSUMPTION THAT TRUDEAU, FOR ALL HIS STYLE, HAS TURNED OFF CANADIAN PEOPLE WHO WILL TURN TO LESS STYLISH, MORE ORGANIZED JOE CLARK WHEN ELECTIONS ARE HELD. THIS ASSUMPTION MAY PROVE WRONG IF TRUDEAU CAMPAIGNS VIGOROUSLY AS PERSON BEST QUALIFIED TO THWART QUEBEC SEPARATISM. ENDERS

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